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Articles in Today's Clips

Monday, June 26, 2006

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TOPIC	PAGE
Foster care*	2-10
Abuse-neglect*	11-15
Child support*	16-19
Day care/preschool/child development	20-26
Domestic abuse	27-30
News release	31

Leaders focus on foster kids

Monday, June 26, 2006

By Susan J. Demas

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Abused children in Michigan face a slippery slope to prison -- and racial inequality is greasing the skids.

Black children battle daunting odds. They make up more than half the state's 20,000 foster-care population, are 88 percent more likely than white children to be arrested and compose one-third of those in the juvenile justice system, a 2005 statewide study indicates.

"You just can't imagine being separated from your family, your home," Jackson Councilman Carl L. Breeding said.

Jackson County is part of the problem.

Black youths are more than four times as likely to be in foster care than their white peers here, making Jackson the fourth-worst of the 18 counties with the biggest foster clientele. The counties typically have significant minority populations.

For more than a year, a 12-member group of police officers, social workers and politicians that includes Breeding has been meeting to figure out why.

The goal is to make a dent in the number of black children in foster care within the next few years.

"This is a huge, huge issue," said task force member Patrick Okoronkwo, child and family services director for Lutheran Social Services of Michigan in Jackson.

Jackson and Washtenaw are the only two counties in Michigan to set up committees on the heels of a statewide task force established by the Legislature in 2004.

"Jackson is really ahead of the curve," said Karen Stock, state Department of Human Services spokeswoman.

The countywide group is studying related factors of racial profiling, poverty, unemployment, housing, drugs, crime and education. Members want to enlist graduate students from Wayne State or Spring Arbor universities to do long-term research.

Blacks who feel they've been unfairly targeted by justice and child welfare workers haven't come before the committee, said member Tanda Reynolds, the county's Department of Human Services head.

Public comments are welcome, Reynolds added.

More diversity training for state officials and hiring more minorities could go a long way in solving the problem of racial inequality, members agree.

"We can't have any double standard," Breeding said.

Tackling these problems takes money. Both the state and county task forces are trying to tap into federal and private nonprofit funds.

Michigan is the only state to fight the racial gap in child welfare on a statewide level, Stock said.

"We want to face it down," she said. "We know the problem is nationwide, but we decided we are going to take it on."

That's one goal of a DHS overhaul known as the Family to Family Initiative -- which debuted in Jackson County last week to try to get more families, neighbors and local groups involved in child welfare.

There are 46 states where black children are twice as likely to be in foster care than white children.

Black children are more likely to be reported abused and not be reunited with their families, the 2005 statewide study said. Abused children are almost 50 percent more likely to become delinquent.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has reported no difference in the rates of child abuse and neglect between white and black children.

Yet in Michigan, the racial disparity is almost threefold in foster care. Black children are 18 percent of the population but compose 53 percent of those in foster care.

The situation is bleaker in Jackson County. The rate of black children in the system is more than four times the proportion of black children in the population as of 2004. Of counties with significant foster-care populations -- 150 kids or more -- only St. Clair, Ottawa and Macomb fare worse.

TV actress advises foster parents to form strong bonds with foster children

Sunday, June 25, 2006

By Cedric Ricks

Kalamzaoo Gazette

Victoria Rowell, an actress on a popular daytime soap opera who grew up in foster care, came to Kalamazoo Valley Community College on Saturday to offer advice and encouragement for foster children and parents.

Rowell lead workshops for youths and answered questions from adults during the seventh annual Foster, Adoptive and Biological Teens Conference sponsored by the Kalamazoo County Department of Human Services and Strong Families/Safe Children.

"I was raised by several incredible women," said Rowell, an actress on "The Young and the Restless" and founder of a scholarship fund for foster children.

Agatha Armstead, a farmer born in 1902, was one of those women. Armstead ignored conventional wisdom of her day and formed a strong bond with her foster children, Rowell said. "Agatha had already had 10 children and was a farmer. This was a woman of the earth, so there was no way she was not going to get attached to us," she said.

Rowell told foster parents at Saturday's conference to emulate Armstead's actions when dealing with their foster children. She said Armstead was one of five foster mothers who helped raise her.

"My advice is to do what Agatha did because (her) feeling was 'I'm going to give you as much as I can give you for the allocation of time that I have you.'"

"It's not the amount of time necessarily" that counts, Rowell said. "It's that quantitative, it's that concentrated thing that happens between two people that counts."

It was Armstead who encouraged Rowell's interest in ballet as a child. When Rowell was 8 years old, Armstead enrolled her in a classical ballet school thanks to a scholarship to the Cambridge School of Ballet in Massachusetts.

Rowell said ballet taught her discipline -- a trait that has helped her achieve success in the entertainment world. She has been honored with 10 NAACP Image Awards and has co-starred in the series "Diagnosis Murder."

Rowell also founded the Rowell Foster Children's Positive Plan, a scholarship fund that helps foster children thrive through fine-arts classes, sports camps and cultural enrichment.

She wrote a script for "Diagnosis Murder" that incorporated a foster-care story line and also successfully lobbied producers for "The Young and the Restless" to add a foster child character to the soap opera's story line.

The television actress said she is in the midst of getting a book published that's titled "The Women Who Raised Me." It addresses the impact of long-term mentoring in a foster child's life.

FOSTER CARE TRANSFER PROGRAM **COMES TO MICHIGAN**

MIRS, Friday, June 23, 2006

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) announced that Michigan is one of six states chosen to participate in the NGA Center's Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care.

The NGA will work with state policy advisors, judges, advocates and legislators to figure how to most effectively help kids who are leaving the foster system transfer into the real world.

The reason for the academy is to help kids who "age out" and leave foster care have the best chance at a successful life and productive life.

'I want this nightmare to be over'

Sisters on the run from foster care system share thoughts in letter

THE FLINT JOURNAL

Sunday, June 25, 2006

By Ron Fonger

GENESEE COUNTY - Before she finds a place to sleep at night, 16-year-old Natasha Sawyers stops to pray a runaway's prayer: Let me find a way to get back to school. Keep my little sister safe with someone who will love and protect her.

Help us live a "good, normal life and help people."

Sawyers, missing from foster care for seven months and on the run with her 14-year-old sister, Ashley, shared her hopes in a sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes frightening four-page letter sent to The Flint Journal.

The Sawyerses were among local runaway foster children profiled in a June 4 Journal report that detailed the plight of the missing kids, including one runaway who became an adult film star the same year the state Department of Human Services was responsible for her care.

15 runaways remain

Here is the most recent list of children who have run away from foster care in Genesee County and remain missing, according to the county's Juvenile Casework Services. The dates indicate how long they've been missing:

Shawanica Bradley, 14, May 17, 2005

Julie Butler, 17, May 25, 2006

Dan Ray Chandanais, 15, April 13, 2006

Ashley Cowan, 17, May 4, 2006

Carrie Davis, 16, Oct. 11, 2005

Arielle Ewing, 17, Nov. 2, 2005

Paige Fox, 14, May 26, 2006

Henry Marshall, 17, Sept. 20, 2005

Joseph Owens, 17, Jan. 19, 2006

Cheyenne Perez, 13, April 3, 2006

Kristina Pringle, 17, Jan. 6, 2006

Ashley Sawyers, 14, Jan. 23, 2006

Natasha Sawyers, 16, Nov. 16, 2005

Monique Tellis, 17, June 2, 2006

Ashley West, 16, July 7, 2005

Four of the 19 Genesee County runaways have been found since the article, but locating missing foster children has been a stubborn problem in Michigan. DHS oversees the care and safety of foster children who have been taken from their parents because of abuse or neglect.

Natasha Sawyers said she and Ashley fear what will happen to them if they surrender to the same child welfare system they've been hiding from.

But she said they are weary from running.

"I would like to go back to school. My sister wants to be in school. We want to be happy ...," says the letter, which has a Flint postmark. "I want this nightmare to be over."

The letter appears to have been signed by Natasha Sawyers but includes no phone number, return address or indication of exactly where she and Ashley have landed. Some details in the letter - the name of her DHS caseworker and the death of her father, for example - match facts in court documents in the Sawyerses' Genesee County Family Court case.

The Journal was unable to contact Sawyerses but after being informed of the letter, their attorney encouraged his clients to come out of hiding.

"If Natasha or Ashley comes in the court would give a lot of consideration to placing the girls in a less restrictive environment," said Frank Vandervort, a lawyer with the University of Michigan Law School's Child Advocacy Law Clinic.

If the girls are found by police, he said, they won't necessarily get that same consideration. Vandervort asked the girls to call him collect at (734) 763-5000.

In her letter, Natasha Sawyers says she and her sister were mistreated in foster care and that she encouraged her sister to run away after she told her she had been beaten and left locked in a basement for two days without food or water.

"I found myself in the streets, switching houses (and) putting up with people who really didn't care for me ... (but) I felt I had no where else to go ...," she wrote.

"It is 2006, and I'm getting sick of this. Why won't they (place) us somewhere where we are safe, comfortable and loved?"

Sheryl Thompson, county DHS director, said the girls don't need to fear coming back into foster care. They won't be punished for having run away, she said, and the agency will look into their claims of abuse.

"We don't want them out on the streets. We want them to be safe," Thompson said.

DHS caseworkers and Vandervort can work out a placement that is stable, Thompson said, including possibly living with a non-relative who is responsible and willing to help.

DHS removed the girls from their mother, Lori L. Manuel, after the state petitioned Family Court in late 2004. The department's contact with the family goes back earlier, however, according to court records.

Documents filed by caseworkers say reasonable efforts were made to keep the family together but failed because of "chronic incidents of neglect and the risk of (Manuel's) repeated disappearances."

Natasha has been reported as missing from foster care since November -about one year after Judge Duncan Beagle approved placing both girls with a relative Nov. 28, 2004. Her sister ran away from foster care in January.

The Journal could not reach Manuel or an aunt of the girls.

Natasha said she "took (on) the big sister-motherly role" and told Ashley to pack her things and join her to get her out of a bad foster placement.

"I remember nights when my younger sister would stay up crying, asking ... what did she do wrong, and why is God doing this? ...," the letter says.

Natasha said she fears being sent to a boot camp or girls home if she surrenders to social workers, but that's not what would happen, according to Family Court Referee Peggy Odette. Attorneys appointed to represent children have become much more vigilant at working with runaways to find a placement that will keep them from running again, Odette said.

She said The Journal's June 4 article resulted in tips from readers about the whereabouts of some runaway children.

Natasha Sawyers' letter

THE FLINT JOURNAL

Sunday, June 25, 2006

Dear Flint Journal Editor:

A story was written on Sunday, June 4, 2006 about a girl who had been in foster care and now a porn star. In that story myself and my sister were featured as runaways. I would like to provide you with some information. We ran away for a reason - we are not "bad" kids. ... following is our story.

My younger sister and I were introduced to the system in 2003. ... In this (foster home) situation I felt like I was the target, that everything that would go on in the house would fall back on me. I remember nights when my younger sister would stay up crying, asking me a question like, "What did she do wrong? and "Why is God doing this to her, and to us?"

I then found myself playing a huge role in her life. Basically, from that night on I became her mother. After months and months of feeling like nothing, the only one I felt was here for me was my younger sister. I got up and decided to leave. It may not have been a good decision but at that time I was right. About a year later I found myself in the streets switching houses, putting up with people who really didn't care for me, just weren't right, only because I felt I had nowhere else to go. At times I wanted to turn myself in and other times I just wanted it all to end.

I was told if I turn myself in I would have to go to a "boot camp" or a girl's home. I have not committed any crime and I did not want to be in a place with people who did who could harm me. I did not understand why I was going to be punished - my sister and I had suffered enough. Instead of taking the wrong road, I just stayed strong for me and my sister.

Months went by and I hadn't seen my sister and I was missing her. Some days she would call my phone just to speak with me. After (she complained of mistreatment) I told her to pack her things because I felt she should not have had to go through that because she had not done anything wrong. Yeah, siblings get into it a lot but my sister was looking out for me and I had to look out for her. ...

Ever since then we have been on the run switching homes. It is 2006 and I'm getting sick of this. Why won't they place us somewhere where we are safe, comfortable, and loved? I would go back to school, my sister wants to be in school. We want to be happy. I want to be a R.N. when I grow up. We are sick of running. A lady I was staying with who was trying to help us told us that a child's life should be happy. That's what we deserve. Me and my sister are still together and together. ...

(My case worker) treats us as if we have committed a terrible crime. But, the only crime we have committed was being a kid. I want this nightmare to be over. I have prayed for help and I believe the newspaper article was a blessing from God. I don't want to go to a reform school or boot camp. I want to go to Job Corps and finish school and get a great job. I want my sister safe with someone who will love and protect her.

For once, listen to what we have to say. We have been taken from a mother we love and our father is not alive. We don't want the same life as the girl who became a porn star, I want to live a good, normal life and help people.

Thank you for listening. If you want you can print and copy.

Natasha Sawyers

Use our outrage to fix foster system

June 25

www.lsj.com

Outrage. It's the only plausible reaction to the plight of foster children as depicted by ABC in the last several weeks. In a series of news shows, the network portrayed children yearning for permanent, loving families, while growing up in foster care. They had experienced horrific abuse or neglect and were still feeling the trauma of broken promises and repeated moves from one foster home or institution to another.

BILL FRENZEL is a former Minnesota congressman and chairman of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care.

BILL GRAY is a former Pennsylvania congressman and vice-chairman of the Pew Commission.

These intimate portrayals have led some to charge that ABC crossed a line, violating the privacy of the youngsters profiled.

But if that is the chief response to the ABC coverage, then Americans are guilty of violating something else — the responsibility we have to care for these children.

Our work as co-chairs of the nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care introduced us to many children whose lives were as tragic as those profiled by ABC. They compel us to act.

Our recommendations were directed to two major sources of foster care drift. The first are the courts, which have the authority to place children in foster care and the responsibility to monitor their progress toward safe, permanent homes. The second is the federal government, which created and administers a misdirected financing system that encourages states to place and keep children in foster care rather than keeping families safely together or in securing safe, loving homes with adoptive parents or legal guardians.

This year, Congress and most of the nation's state courts adopted many of the Pew Commission's recommendations related to the courts. As a result, judges will soon have better information about the cases before them, more training in how to address the needs of the children before their courts, and tough requirements to work closely and collaboratively with child welfare officials who share responsibility with the courts for children in foster care.

Still remaining is the significant challenge of fixing a broken financing system. The Pew Commission has proposed recommendations that would maintain the federal government's guarantee of a safety net while also giving states financial incentives and greater freedom to use federal foster care dollars to tailor their services.

Although our proposals include new federal dollars, they are more about redirecting existing dollars in ways that increase children's chances of leaving foster care for a safe, permanent home. The Pew Commission also recommended better ways for the federal government to monitor states' progress in serving children in foster care — because better accountability goes hand-in-hand with new resources and greater freedom.

Placing a child in foster care involves more than removing her from a dangerous home. It's a promise to protect her and get her quickly to a safe, permanent family. As a nation, we're late in keeping that promise to the children in foster care. That's an outrage we can do something about.

KRT News Service

COUNTERPOINT

Program might have saved Ricky

The Jackson Citizen Patriot
Sunday, June 25, 2006

ALEXANDRIA, Va. -- I was puzzled to read the death of Ricky Holland cited as a reason to oppose Family to Family, an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which also helps to fund my organization. In fact, the case shows how badly Family to Family is needed.

The editorial claims the state doesn't "take kids away soon enough" and doesn't "get them out of their dangerous environment." But Ricky was taken too soon, from his birth mother, solely because she was homeless and jobless. And if the charges are true, it was the state that put Ricky into his "dangerous environment," the foster and adoptive home where he died.

Contrary to the myths, such hair-trigger removals of poor people's children are too common in Michigan. The state takes children at more than double the rate of Illinois -- yet in Illinois, independent court-appointed monitors have found that, as foster care plummeted, child safety improved.

A recent national study found that one-third of foster-care alumni said they were abused by a foster parent or another adult in a foster home. Overall, only 20 percent of the alumni could be said to be doing well. In contrast, a University of North Carolina evaluation of Family to Family found that the program reduced foster care, and kept more children with their extended families, with no compromise of safety.

Were Family to Family around when Ricky's mother first looked for help, the program would have mobilized her friends, neighbors and community agencies to help her find a job, find housing, and keep her little boy safe. Ricky Holland could have been kept out of a system that churns out walking wounded four times out of five. He'd almost certainly be alive today.

-- Richard Wexler, Executive Director
National Coalition for Child Protection Reform

Also on our mind ...

FLINT JOURNAL EDITORIAL

Sunday, June 25, 2006

Developments in the Rose Kelly tragedy can't really be called good news, but it's at least a step in the right direction that the state now says it will make public the results of two investigations into the 5-year-old's death in her squalid Flint home.

We owe it to the memory of this little girl to pay close attention to what these reviews find.

| IN BRIEF

Judge to open sealed Holland records

Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield on Friday said she will inspect sealed medical records of Tim and Lisa Holland, as well as of their deceased son, Ricky, to determine whether they should be turned over to prosecutors.

Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency said in court that the records, from between June 30 and July 5, 2005, could deal with child abuse or reveal other facts related to his case. Ricky was reported missing July 2, 2005.



Ricky

"If Ricky Holland had injuries requiring medical treatment and no treatment was given — that is child abuse," Ferency said.

The Williamston couple is scheduled to stand trial Sept. 11 before different juries on charges they killed Ricky. They are also are charged with first-degree child abuse.

Attorneys for both Hollands said the prosecutor's request was nothing more than a fishing expedition.

"He's not confident with the evidence he has," Lisa Holland's co-counsel Andrew Abood said.

Saturday

JUNE 24, 2006
www.lsj.com

Experts remind parents of danger hot cars pose to kids

LST June 25

39% of children's deaths attributed to forgetfulness

By MURRAY EVANS

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY —

It's a scenario that's tragically repeated dozens of times a year: A parent places a toddler in the back seat of a vehicle on a hot day and later becomes distracted, leaving the child inside to swelter and die.

Authorities in Payne County in Oklahoma say that's what happened last Sunday, when temperatures soared into the 90s and the father of 21-month-old Banyan Blaze Roberts forgot to take the sleeping boy out of a vehicle after returning from a family outing.

Banyan, whose core temperature rose to 107.9 degrees, later died in a hospital. A core temperature of 107 is considered lethal.

He was at least the fifth child to die across the nation this year after being left in a hot vehicle, said Jan Null, a San Francisco State University meteorology professor

who tracks such deaths. On Friday, a 14-month-old boy in Little Rock, Ark., became another victim after his mother accidentally left him in her car for four hours.

Other cases occurred in South Carolina, Florida, Texas and Tennessee. They involved children ranging in age from 8 months to 3 years.

At least 31 such deaths have been recorded every year in the United States since 1998, with 42 each in 2003 and 2005, Null said. Banyan's death is the eighth child hyperthermia fatality in Oklahoma during that span.

A study by the Newton,

"We need to change how we think about the car. We need to regard it as a hazard, like we would with children around swimming pools."

Anara Guard

Education Development Center in Newton, Mass.

Mass.-based Education Development Center examined 171 child hyperthermia deaths from 1995 through 2002. They found that 39 percent were attributed to a caregiver's forgetfulness and that 27 percent were the result of unattended children playing in or

around vehicles.

"Every single one of these deaths is totally preventable — if the car had been locked, if you hadn't forgotten the child," Null said.

Temperatures inside a vehicle can rise quickly — about 19 degrees in 10 min-

utes and 43 degrees in an hour — and the vehicle can "become an oven," he said.

Anara Guard, who led the study for the Massachusetts center, said parents and other adults are sometimes too comfortable in their vehicles.

"We need to change how we think about the car," she said. "We need to regard it as a hazard, like we would with children around swimming pools."

In Banyan's case, his father, 29-year-old Justin Roberts, was taking care of him and two other children.

Roberts simply became distracted, said Payne Coun-

ty Undersheriff Noel Bagwell, calling the case a "tragic accident."

Null said technology is available to develop reminder alarms or sensors, but that two issues remain: Vehicle manufacturers would have to be persuaded they're a worthwhile addition, and if an aftermarket item is marketed, parents must be persuaded to use it.

"They're going to say, 'I'm not going to forget my child.' So I think the best avenue right now is raising the level of awareness," he said. "Even the best parents make these sorts of mistakes."

Sex offender changed his appearance

Robert Barwick found by police after failing to register with state

Saturday, June 24, 2006

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT

Ann Arbor News

A convicted sex offender who failed to register his address with the state has been arrested in Ypsilanti Township.

Robert O. Barwick, 41, was sought by Michigan State Police on a felony warrant for failing to register.

Trooper Eric Byerly said Barwick was arrested at the Eastern Highlands apartments on Leforge Road Thursday morning by the State Police fugitive team. He said police were tipped to his location by informants.

Byerly said Barwick had changed his appearance considerably by cutting off his hair and beard after his photo ran in The Ann Arbor News in March.

Barwick was convicted of fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct in 2001 in Ann Arbor, for biting a 22-year-old woman. He has also served time for assault with a dangerous weapon, and resisting and obstructing and fleeing and eluding police.

Three other men also sought for failing to register last January are:

- Scott A. Bedolla, 40, who police believe might be in Ypsilanti, Canton Township or Saline. Bedolla was convicted in Detroit in 1997 of second-degree criminal sexual conduct for contact with a 13-year-old girl. He also is listed on a state Web site as an absconder from probation on a 2002 larceny conviction.
- Antoine L. Edja, 21, who might be out of state. He was convicted in Ann Arbor in 2003 of second-degree criminal sexual conduct in an incident with a 15-year-old girl, and placed on three years probation. Edja is listed on a state Web site as an absconder from probation.
- Quintrell D. Willis, 27, who might be living in the Ann Arbor area. Willis was a juvenile when he was convicted of first-degree criminal sexual conduct in Flint in 1994. First-degree CSC carries a maximum life prison sentence for adult offenders.

Byerly asked anyone with information about any of the men to call 734-482-1211, or to e-mail him at byerlyej@michigan.gov. Callers may remain anonymous.

Susan Oppat can be reached at soppat@annarbornews.com or at 734-482-1166.

Child support cash awaits many

June 25, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The state is stepping up efforts to connect thousands of Michigan families with \$11.4 million in child support money held for them -- unclaimed -- in Lansing.

A recent upgrade to the Michigan Department of Human Services Web site -- www.michigan.gov/dhs -- allows custodial parents or caregivers to search online for the money.

The money was collected over the past several years by 83 Friend of the Court offices around the state, but caseworkers could not locate most of the 34,409 people owed money. Some of the unclaimed money also belongs to people who did not cash the checks they were sent.

"Our priority is getting child support to families," Marilyn Stephen, director of the DHS Office of Child Support, said last week. "In some cases over \$10,000 has accumulated."

Before the money lands in unclaimed funds accounts, the staffs of local Friend of the Court and state DHS offices devote considerable time and effort to try to find the intended recipients, Stephen said.

Often, the person has moved without notifying the state of a change of address, she said. Debbie Kline, executive director of the Association for Children for Enforcement of Support (ACES), said the Web site could be helpful.

"My only issue with that is how somebody knows that they should look at it," Kline said last week. "It's kind of an easy way out for them."

Kline said the state should do more than upgrade its Web site to find families. "The families are not hiding. They're not underground like noncustodial parents," she said.

ACES is a nonprofit advocacy organization based in Vicksburg, Va., that works to help custodial parents who are owed child support.

Stephen said finding people who are owed the money already collected is "a very high priority." The Web site, she said, "is really just one more tool for us to use, but it doesn't replace anything we're doing today."

To claim money

To learn whether the state is holding child support money for you, go to www.michigan.gov/dhs and click on the link for Child Support -- Unclaimed Funds. You'll be asked for the last four digits of your Social Security number. That will allow you to see if there is money waiting for you.

There are also links to a change of address form, to find phone numbers for local Friend of the Court offices and to the unclaimed property site of the state Department of Treasury.

To find out more call ACES, the child support advocacy group, at 800-537-7072 or go to www.childsupport-aces.org.

There are 2,000 Friend of the Court employees statewide and 180 employees in the DHS Office of Child Support in Detroit and Lansing. Another 400 employees in local prosecutors' offices also work on child support collections.

The state's child support system distributes about \$1.4 billion every year, including about \$400 million in past-due support. Michigan is the fourth highest-ranking state in the amount of support collected and third highest in arrearages collected.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com

Cops seize pit bulls, drugs, guns in arrest

'Deadbeat Dad' squad fires Taser to subdue suspect, who first tried to hide

PUBLISHED: June 26, 2006

By Mitch Hotts

Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A Center Line man accused of being more than \$30,000 behind in his child support payments hid from and then fought with police trying to arrest him Sunday, police said.

Investigators also discovered drugs and weapons in the home.

Stunned neighbors conducting garage sales or relaxing on their porches watched as Center Line public safety officers and Macomb County Sheriff's deputies raided the home on Superior near the area of 10 Mile Road and Van Dyke.

The suspect, whose name was not released pending a court hearing today, was taken into custody after Center Line officers used a Taser stun gun to subdue him.

"First we were told he wasn't in the house and then we found out he was hiding in the attic and he refused to come out," said Lt. Robert Taylor of the Macomb County Sheriff's Office.

The raid was part of the sheriff's office "Deadbeat Dad" undercover investigation squad, said Sheriff Mark Hackel.

Investigators said they had an arrest warrant for the 30-year-old suspect for not paying his former wife more than \$30,000 in child support. Undercover officers had been monitoring his movements and decided to make the arrest Sunday afternoon.

Officers also found small amounts of marijuana and cocaine inside the house along with several firearms. Neighbors who watched the raid said they saw officers bring out a handgun and a shotgun.

The county's animal control department was called to remove a number of pit bulls. Police suspected the dogs had been abused, but an initial review of the dogs did not seem to indicate any scars or injuries.

Taylor said the suspect will also face charges of resisting arrest, along with possession of drugs and firearms. A woman who was also taken into custody may face drug and weapons charges, police said. It was not immediately clear what her relationship is to the suspect.

According to Taylor, officers announced their presence to the woman who claimed the suspect had gone fishing.

Police entered the two-story home and found the suspect hiding in the upper floor. He refused numerous orders to surrender and only did so after Center Line officers fired a Taser at him, which generates an electrical current.

During their search of the home, police said the drugs were "in plain sight."

The deadbeat dad squad took over tracking down suspects on behalf of the Friend of the Court a few years back, Hackel said. He said the squad has been "extremely aggressive" in locating suspects.

"Seventy-five percent of the time, they go peacefully and there's no problem," Hackel said. Several residents of Superior said they noticed a lot of traffic going into and out of the house.

"This kind of brings the neighborhood closer together," said one homeowner, pointing to a number of residents watching the raid.

Tossed out: Kids in day care are expelled at an alarming rate

By Stacey Range

Lansing State Journal

Published June 25, 2006

Ryan Mefford couldn't even walk, much less talk, but in his first eight months of life he was kicked out of three day-care centers.

His incessant crying was driving caregivers crazy and disrupting the other children.

His mother, Patti Pawski, was beyond frustration. She grew fearful each time her phone rang.

"Sometimes I'd take him in and get a call that same day asking me to come get him," the Lansing woman said. "Sometimes they called the next day; sometimes it lasted a little bit longer. I didn't know what to do. I felt like a horrible mother."

Expulsion at such a tender age might seem brutal, but researchers and industry experts say it's happening at alarming rates as often low-paid and minimally qualified providers struggle to cope with a record number of children in child care.

While providers don't have to report expulsions, experts believe that in Michigan alone, about 2 percent of all children in day care and preschool - as many as 7,000 under age 6 - are tossed out every year for behavioral and emotional problems. That rate is nearly five times higher than all kindergarten through grade 12 students expelled annually from Michigan's public schools.

The impact is greater than simply having to find a new caregiver. Experts say evicting a child from their first academic experience can lead to bigger problems.

"It puts them on a trajectory toward failure," said Sheri Falvay, director of mental health services to children and families at the Michigan Department of Human Services. "They might get involved in the juvenile justice system and they likely won't do well in school."

Solution seekers

Pawski feared Ryan was on that path after he was kicked out of his fourth day care at the age of 2. By then he was biting, kicking and hitting children and teachers.

The single mother feared losing her job as an assistant biosafety officer at Michigan State University if she had to take off more time to care for him, so Pawski got help through a program Falvay oversees.

The state's Child Care Expulsion Prevention programs - one of just a few such systems in the nation - sends mental health consultants to day cares where children are at risk of

being expelled. The consultants try to diagnose the source of the problem and work with parents and teachers to resolve it.

That can involve anything from referring the child to free or low-cost speech and language therapy or hearing checks to moving a screaming infant to a quieter part of the nursery.

"We really have to look at a range of potential causes, especially when the child can't communicate enough to tell us what's wrong," said Kathy Vogel, one of two consultants with Lansing's Keeping Early Education Positive, CCEP's mid-Michigan program.

Since its inception in 1999, CCEP has grown to a dozen sites serving 26 counties with hopes to eventually cover all 83 counties.

Funding means more sites

CCEP appears to work for many children. Of the 551 children referred to the program in 2004-05, 38 ended up getting expelled, said Mary Mackrain, the program's statewide technical assistant. Most - 397 children - stayed in their day care.

Still, thousands of children don't have access to the program, Mackrain said. For them, children's advocates now are pushing Michigan officials to bump up the program's \$1.4 million budget this year. The desired extra \$500,000 in federal monies would fund four more sites, an evaluation of the program and more training for child-care providers. The new sites haven't been selected but Falvey said they'd be in areas unserved now.

Lynnette and Steve Erlandson of Farmington Hills think every parent should have access to an expulsion-prevention program that helped their 3-year-old son, John.

The boy started biting classmates when he was just 10 months old. A consultant told them he was biting to communicate. He bit when he was happy, mad, scared, sad.

Teachers tried to redirect his activities and taught the other children to avoid behaviors that would bring out the biting. Still, it took time and other parents were insisting that the biting stop or John be removed.

A year later, John is thriving at a new day care in Livonia. He hasn't bitten another child in two-and-a-half months, his mom said.

Two weeks ago, Erlandson said, John "got bit by another child and he said 'No biting,' and he didn't bite back."

Many factors contribute

After 25 years in child care, Kristy Moeller says she sees more children exhibit behavioral and emotional problems than ever before.

"Children seem to be more stressed today," the director of Oak Park YMCA's Y-Care Children's Center said.

But while lots of child-care providers agree, no one knows exactly why. Most experts believe it's a combination of factors, including:

- Not only are there a record number of children in day care, they are spending more time there, some up to 10 and 12 hours a day.
- Children have greater stress with parents' higher divorce rates, more single parents and increased activity loads.
- There's greater awareness of potential problems, and with more children in child care, more people notice them.

"It's probably not one thing for most kids," said Walter Gilliam, director of the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University. "It's not simply that kids have more problems or that we see them more. It's both."

Although there's little in the way of actual expulsion data for tots, Gilliam has produced two studies suggesting that the rates are high.

One study published in the July-September issue of *Infants & Young Children* indicates that 27 of every 1,000 children are expelled from privately run care centers.

Another study of state-financed pre-kindergarten systems found that nearly seven preschoolers of every 1,000 are expelled.

The Michigan School Readiness Program, the state-funded preschool for 4-year-olds, had one of the best rates, ranking fifth-lowest among the nation's 40 state systems.

Gilliam credited Michigan's expulsion prevention program for the state's high ranking.

"Michigan really is a pioneer in this effort," he said.

Potential future success

Ryan, now 4, is getting better.

He's been going to Lansing's Elite Preparatory for almost two years - a record for the tyke. It's not that he hasn't gotten into trouble, but the school has a no-expulsion policy.

"He probably would have gone through a lot more if it weren't for this day care," said his mom, Patti Pawski. "They are adamant about not kicking him out."

His counselor with the KEEP program helped diagnose him earlier this year with sensory and modulation problems, making him overly sensitive to noises and things he touched, Pawski said. His sensitivity would lead him to act out.

But the slight, talkative child now is getting help from an occupational therapist. KEEP continues to work with him and his teachers to modify his behavior and environment.

Pawski, 42, believes the effort will help her son succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

"He's really a bright kid with a lot of potential," she said. "But a lot of people had just labeled him as a bad kid. They just didn't know how to handle him. That could have really hurt his future success."

Contact Stacey Range at 377-1157 or srange@lsj.com.

NOT REAL Dozens of preschoolers kicked out of various programs have ended up at one of three Early Childhood Development Centers in the Lansing area.

"We have kids who've been expelled from daycare after daycare after daycare," said Julie Allen, executive director of Child Abuse Prevention Services, a private, nonprofit agency that runs the preschools for at-risk kids.

Two years ago, when Allen directed the preschool programs, she took in a 4-year-old Lansing boy who'd been kicked out of four other day care centers.

The boy had severe anger issues. In addition to screaming and throwing tantrums, she said he would hit, kick and bite his classmates and teachers.

When she tried to talk to him, the boy replied: "It doesn't matter what I do. You're just going to kick me out."

"It broke my heart," Allen said. "He was 4 years old. He shouldn't know about being kicked out so young."

The preschool though has a no-expulsion policy. Instead, it hires administrators and teachers with at least bachelor's degrees in psychology, sociology or early childhood development. If needed, the center will refer the family to outside counselors for help.

In the case of the 4-year-old boy, Allen said she and another teacher worked with him constantly and he was able to go on to kindergarten the following year.

"If you expel a child you give them a label as a bad child," Allen said. "They don't want to be at school anyway. You have to address the problem and get them to want to be at school."

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Lansing-area preschools address tots' problems

No-expulsion policy identifies kids' needs, helps families adjust

By Stacey Range

Lansing State Journal

Published June 25, 2006

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Man, 62, charged with day care porn

Associated Press

Published June 25, 2006

Lansing State Journal

PORT HURON - A 62-year-old man was charged with producing child pornography and sexually assaulting children at the day care center his wife ran in their home.

William Porrett was arraigned Friday on nine charges including first-degree criminal sexual conduct, second-degree criminal sexual conduct and production of child pornography. If convicted of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, he faces up to life in prison.

Porrett was being held in the St. Clair County jail. A preliminary hearing was scheduled for July 7 in St. Clair County District Court.

Advertisement

Police began investigating Porrett in May when an alleged victim came forward with information, Detective Brian Georgia told the Times Herald of Port Huron.

Georgia said he has since identified a total of five children who were either sexually assaulted, used to produce pornography, or both.

Acquitted in killing, she wants job back

Woman fired while in jail is suing DaimlerChrysler

June 26, 2006

BY L.L. BRASIER

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Sharon Spangler was in the upstairs bathroom of her Dryden home fixing her hair and contemplating her new life.

It was November 2002, and Spangler, a DaimlerChrysler Corp. engineer, had signed the divorce papers a day before, ending her 14-year marriage to Steven Spangler.

Then, the dog barked. Her estranged husband was coming up the stairs.

She later would tell investigators he had picked up the gun she kept on her nightstand and came at her. His fists. Then the gun fell, and she grabbed it and fired.

A Lapeer County jury later would reject prosecutors' claims -- based on Steven Spangler's statements before he died a day later -- that she had provoked the fight to make his killing look like self-defense. It still cost Sharon Spangler her job; she had been on a leave for stress and, while in jail, she couldn't make the required medical appointments, the company said.

And when she was acquitted, DaimlerChrysler told her that her job no longer existed. Now she's suing in Oakland County Circuit Court to get that job back.

"I did nothing wrong. I was saving my own life. I worked 20 years for this company, and in my darkest hours, they turned their backs," Sharon Spangler, 48, said this month in an interview. DaimlerChrysler, however, is standing by its claim, saying that Spangler -- who once had helped manage the company's Jeep division -- was dealt with in accordance with company policies.

"Like all employees on medical leave for similar claims, Ms. Spangler was required to attend a company-arranged medical evaluation. When she failed to report for the exam, she was terminated -- the same consequence other employees would have faced in this situation," company officials said in a written response to the Free Press' questions last week.

"Following this termination, the position was eliminated, along with thousands of others, as a result of DaimlerChrysler's downsizing. At a time when thousands of autoworkers were losing their jobs it would have been unreasonable to expect any company to hold a job open for a year and a half," company officials said.

To find help

In case of domestic violence, contact:

- Rochester Area Neighborhood House: 248-651-5836.
- HAVEN crisis line: 877-922-1274 or 248-334-1274.
- Lighthouse of Oakland County: 248-920-6100.
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-7233.
- Interim House (Detroit): 313-861-5300.

Policy versus law

At the center of the case is whether the company had the right to fire Spangler, and corporate attorneys who deal with workplace issues say that mostly comes down to each individual corporation's policies.

Spangler, for instance, was a so-called at-will employee, meaning she could be terminated at DaimlerChrysler's discretion.

But laws protect employees from being fired for impermissible reasons, such as discrimination or missing work for jury duty.

Beyond those examples, however, the issue can become murky.

"You cannot discharge an employee for a legally impermissible reason," said Michael Lavoie, a partner with Butzel Long, a law firm that specializes in corporate law. "So the question becomes, 'Was this permissible?'"

Attorney Robert Vercruysse of Vercruysse Murray & Calzone, a Bingham Farms firm specializing in workplace law, said an employee unable to come to work because of jail can be fired, regardless of the outcome of the case.

"It's never an excuse," he said.

Sharon Spangler thinks it should be, however.

When she met Steven Spangler at the Dodge Truck plant on Mound Road in 1984, they were an unlikely couple. Then 26, Sharon was a chemical engineer with a degree from Lawrence Tech. Steven, who was five years older, was divorced, an hourly worker with a high school diploma. Five years later, they wed.

"He made me feel safe. He could be a lot of fun," said Sharon Spangler.

The couple lived quietly and Sharon worked long hours at DaimlerChrysler as a chemical engineer, moving up the management ladder and bringing home six-figure paychecks.

Eventually, they left their home in Fraser, moving first to Almont, then to Dryden.

Steven left the auto company to try his own hand at business. As a real estate agent, he hit pay dirt when he subdivided some land in Dryden. A later project, however, stalled.

Sharon Spangler said that as Steven got older, he became depressed. He started taking appetite suppressants that made him jittery, she claimed, and grew obsessed with exercising, an account his family denied, according to prosecutors.

Members of Steven Spangler's family could not be reached for comment.

Sharon also maintained that Steven had begun battering her, twice sending her to the doctor with bruises and sprained muscles. She told no one, however, saying she was too embarrassed.

By 2002, she was trying to work as many hours as she could at DaimlerChrysler to avoid being alone with him. And she learned her husband was having an affair.

In early November of that year, Sharon began counseling to fight her own depression and took a medical leave from her job. It was in the counseling, she said, that she realized she had to leave her husband.

She signed the divorce papers on Nov. 19, 2002. Forty-eight hours later, she was charged with first-degree murder.

Timothy Turkelson, who was then the chief assistant prosecutor of Lapeer County, said much of the prosecution's case was based on Steven Spangler's statements to police and rescue workers before he died. He admitted to hitting her, but said Sharon had provoked him by spitting at him. And Steven Spangler said he was getting ready to leave when she shot him in the side. "And I believe that to be true," Turkelson said.

A law professor and assistant dean at the University of Michigan, hearing of the case, came to see Sharon two days after her arrest.

"It was hard to look at, her black eyes, the substantial bruising on her face, her upper body," U-M law professor Bridget McCormack said this month. "She was so shaken and emotional. I could see she had taken a lot before she fought back."

McCormack decided to help defend Spangler for free.

"Once I'd met her and seen her, I knew I could not turn my back on her."

The medical-leave issue

Shortly after Spangler's arrest, DaimlerChrysler notified her that she would have to undergo a medical exam to continue her medical leave or show up for work by Jan. 3. Family members and attorneys contacted the company. She's in jail, they said, and the judge won't allow her to post bond.

In early January 2003, Sharon Spangler learned from her jail cell that she had been fired. "I had been OK up until then, but at that point, I lost all hope," she said.

She was in jail for eight months, before posting 10% of a \$1-million bond. And as she grappled with the loss of her job, her lawyers were putting together her defense.

Ann Arbor attorney Douglas Mullkoff became the lead defense attorney. He was astonished at the prosecution's theory of what had happened. Authorities argued that Sharon, angry over her husband's affair, had lured him to the home, provoked the beating and then shot him.

"It was an outrageous theory, not supported by the facts or evidence," said Mulkoff.

Jurors deliberated about five hours before acquitting her in March 2004.

"I made a strategic mistake in arguing murder one. The evidence of premeditation was weak," said Turkelson, who since has left Lapeer County and has a private practice in Bingham Farms. "But it was a good murder-two case. I was stunned when the jury came back and acquitted her."

For the first few months after the acquittal, Sharon Spangler, who now lives in St. Clair, said she worked to put her life back together. She sold the Dryden home to pay her legal fees. And she began calling DaimlerChrysler, asking when she could come back.

After several calls went unanswered, she said a supervisor told her on the phone, "you better get an attorney."

The case is assigned to Oakland County Circuit Judge Denise Langford Morris, and is not expected to go to trial until early next year.

"Our feeling is that Chrysler just didn't want to be associated with a woman who was on trial for murder," said Jennifer Salvatore, an Ann Arbor attorney representing Sharon Spangler in the civil case.

In the lawsuit, Spangler alleges that her civil rights have been violated, and that the company also is violating victims rights laws. Such laws prohibit companies from firing victims of crime for failing to show up for work because of pending legal matters.

DaimlerChrysler and its lawyers are standing by their stance that her firing was justified and that Sharon Spangler has been treated fairly.

"The thing that is really troubling is that this company emphasizes diversity, gives money to domestic violence charities, and here, one of its own workers, a stellar employee and in her moment of greatest need, kicks her to the curb," Salvatore said this month.

"No woman, no person should have to choose between saving their life and keeping their job. That's what this comes down to."

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JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

**Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or
Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394**

Michigan Department of Human Services Summarily Suspends the Family Day Care Home Certificate of Registration License Number of Darlene Cauffman

June 23, 2006

The Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Children and Adult Licensing issued an order of summary suspension and notice of intent to revoke the certificate of registration of Berrien County family day care home provider Darlene Cauffman, 1073 Carberry Road, Niles, Michigan. This action resulted from a recent investigation of a complaint of the child day care family home.

The June 21, 2006, complaint investigation found violations of the Child Care Organizations Act and administrative rules regarding caregiver and child care family home. OCAL took emergency action to protect the health, welfare, and safety of children.

Effective 6:00 p.m., June 23, 2006, the Summary Suspension Order prohibits Darlene Cauffman from operating a family day care home at 1073 Carberry Road, Niles, Michigan or at any other address or location. Accordingly, she may not accept children for care after that date and time. The order also requires Ms. Cauffman to inform all of the parents of children in her care that her certificate of registration has been suspended and that she can no longer provide day care.

Ms. Cauffman has held a certificate of registration to operate a family day care home since March 22, 2004. The certificate of registration was for six children.

Michigan law defines a day care family home "as a private home in which 1 but fewer than 7 minor children are received for care and supervision for periods of less than 24 hours a day, unattended by a parent or legal guardian, except children related to an adult member of the family by blood, marriage, or adoption."

For more information, consult DHS Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs.